

Foster Care and Adoption

S U C C E S S F U L F A M I L I E S

THE CONTRERAS FAMILY

Making foster care a part of your life.

For most people, foster parenting is an opportunity to provide a helping hand to a child in need. While Barbara and Victor Contreras may share that opinion, any discussion of the topic quickly reveals that — after 13 years and more than 40 foster children — foster parenting for them is more a way of life than just about doing a good turn.

Barbara and Victor became licensed foster care providers in 1989 so Barbara could qualify for the Personal Care Provider program, which allowed her to work at home and be with the couple's five children. Their first child was a 3-year-old boy with a severe mental disability. The experience was so positive the boy remains with the family to this day.

According to Barbara, the reasons are simple: "He gives so much love, and we have grown as individuals with a greater understanding of people with disabilities."

From foster care to adoption

The Contreras family, when they first became foster parents, had no plans to adopt any of the children in their care. However, that quickly changed. The family took in an infant who at 8 months old required surgery to correct a heart condition. His courage so impressed the family that when the child needed a permanent home, there was no question where he would reside. Today, at age 7,

he continues to amaze the family. "He has taught us what courage is all about," Barbara says.

Two years ago, a local "Wednesday's Child" television broadcast featured a sibling group consisting of three children. Moved by their plight, Barbara and Victor brought the children into their home under foster care while taking steps toward adopting them.

While foster care is about providing temporary assistance to children in need, there is always the chance that temporary care may grow into something much more.

Three years ago, Barbara and Victor took in five little girls. The girls' mother was incarcerated for a drug offense. After the mother's release, her losing battle with drugs soon had her back in prison. "We couldn't imagine splitting the girls up," Barbara says. "The first time they were with us for a year. When their mother went back to prison, they came back to us." Currently the court is deciding the girls' fate. Should parental rights be terminated, the Contreras family is prepared to take steps to adopt all five girls.

Barbara is full of praise for all her children, but concedes there are challenges: "It is not always easy, but when everyone does their part and we work out the problems, the rewards are amazing."

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The Contreras Home: Love and Support

Currently, the Contreras family includes 15 children, 11 of which live at home. With so many children living under one roof, there is always something going on — dance lessons, piano lessons, or a baseball game. Ensuring the smooth running of the house and the family requires more than a little outside assistance. Barbara credits her biological children with helping to make things work. "They're great," she says. "They treat the kids like their biological siblings."

Barbara knows her biological children have benefited from sharing their home with foster children. "My daughter is involved with foster care," Barbara says. "She works with older kids who have behavioral problems, and they're more difficult. I'm very proud of her."

When asked how she and her husband are able to maintain a strong relationship amidst so much change, she is emphatic: "It's hard, but you have

to make time for each other." Barbara and Victor make a point of doing just that. Once a week, the older kids watch the younger ones so Barbara and Victor can get out. "We have our weekly date," she says. "The older kids baby-sit the younger ones so my husband and I have a chance to spend time together."

It takes a lot of heart to care

Foster care is not without its emotional upheavals. "People ask us how we keep from becoming attached to these kids," Barbara says. "Well, we don't. Each one of these kids becomes a member of our family, and it's hard to see them go. You want them to go back to a better environment — that is the goal. Still, keeping that goal in mind can be difficult," confides Barbara: "I always save a bit of my heart to say goodbye."

**Barbara and Victor Contreras are recent recipients of an Angels in Adoption award given by the United States Congress in recognition of their outstanding work as foster parents.*



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

For additional information about foster care or adoption, call the Idaho CareLine at 211 or go to www.idahochild.org